

DISTANCE LEARNING

BEST PRACTICES

FROM 'SKILLS FOR JOBS' PARTNER VET SCHOOLS



**DISTANCE LEARNING:
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FROM 'SKILLS FOR JOBS'
PARTNER VET SCHOOLS**
November 2020

This publication is created by 'Skills for Jobs' (S4J) project.

About Skills for Jobs

'Skills for Jobs' (S4J) is a project of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by Swisscontact Albania.

S4J addresses the main challenges of the Albanian Vocational Education and Training (VET) system by focusing on ensuring systemic change, capacity development and empowerment of key actors. Based on this approach, S4J supports partner VET providers in Albania in terms of employers' and partners' relations, diversification of VET offer, new ways of inclusive learning and quality, work-based learning in cooperation with employers, and organisational development.

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Dear readers,

The Covid-19 pandemic confronted teachers and students with a new reality of distance learning. As never before, it became necessary to adapt different methods of teaching and learning to enable the continuity of the learning process and to stimulate students' interest in physical distance conditions.

Following the commitment to support teachers and instructors in applying new ways of learning in Vocational Education and Training (VET), 'Skills for Jobs' S4J project presents a summary of best online teaching practices during the second half of the 2019-2020 academic year, when distance learning was applied. This is the second publication showcasing best practices in pedagogical methods from S4J partner providers. It presents a variety of innovative methods used by teachers and instructors of S4J project partner schools, which are based on contemporary pedagogical models and inspired by the Swiss VET model, holder of the Gold Standard (according to the Center on International Education Benchmarking CIEB).

The publication is divided into 6 parts, where each presents practices related to i) development of teaching materials, ii) use of digital platforms, iii) realization of the learning process, iv) students' emotional support, v) carrying out apprenticeships, and vi) synchronous and asynchronous learning. Each case presents the context, challenges and the process of its realization, as well as skills and competencies developed by the students at the end of the process. You will learn about the techniques that each teacher or group of teachers used, not only to continue the learning process in physical distancing conditions, but also to keep alive students' interest and engage them during distance learning.

One of the biggest challenges of VET in these conditions has been carrying out apprenticeships. Some of the teachers and instructors came up with interesting methods to continue the practical training of students: the use of interactive digital materials and practical examples, learning through projects, promoting online entrepreneurship or engaging local businesses are some examples presented in this publication.

I invite you to learn more about these good practices we have identified and hope they are valuable and inspiring to all teachers. This publication is also useful for actors of interest involved in the VET sector to learn more about pedagogical models with a focus on collaborative learning partnerships with teachers, students and workplace, and schools' response towards the new reality.

We believe that there is no better support for teachers than the experience of their colleagues.

Sincerely yours,

Fation Dragoshi
Project Manager
'Skills for Jobs' (S4J) Project



Dear readers,

Digitalization is a global trend that does not stop in the Western Balkans. On the contrary, digitalization is fundamentally changing the way the Albanian labor market functions. These developments pose challenges for the VET sector, on one hand to address the urgent need to train specialists for work and very specific technical skills in the ICT sector, and on the other hand to ensure that all young people and adults have at least some basic digital knowledge. Thus, even in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, embracing digitalization requires a better understanding of industry needs, the use of new technologies, and innovative ways of learning. Thus, in addition to individual skills, the pedagogical dimension that includes interactive teaching and combined learning are of central importance in setting up the VET system preparing for the digital age.

Due to the pandemic imposing the cessation for an indefinite period of the entire education system in the country, vocational schools were instructed to carry out "teaching / learning from home". Distance learning, despite the short time that is being implemented in vocational schools, carries some features that enable coping with the situation we are going through, the duration of which cannot yet be predicted. Such features are speed of communication, digitization, low cost, high adaptability, flexibility, creating closer teacher-student, student-student and student-parent connections, responsibility, creativity and student self-study, control and simultaneous evaluation, etc.

The experience created by carrying out distance learning in these emergency conditions is a good basis for an extension to those subjects, topics or specific aspects of the learning process even in normal conditions, since it enables increased effectiveness and efficiency, as well as helps students rapidly fulfill their learning objectives.

I am thankful to 'Skills for Jobs' project for the support provided in the process and a big thank you goes to all teachers of vocational schools who are constantly looking for methodologies and solutions that not only avoid difficulties and obstacles, but also increase the effectiveness of distance learning.

Ejvis Gishti
General Director
National Agency of Vocational Education Training and Qualifications

Contents

A	Teaching Materials _____	8
	1. Developing Diverse Digital Materials on Mesovet Platform to Support Students During Lockdown _____	8
	2. Teachers' Collaboration for Developing Digital Materials for a Course _____	10
B	Digital Platforms _____	12
	3. Using Digital Learning Platforms to Support the Practical Learning Process _____	12
	4. Using Different Online Platforms for Online Learning _____	14
C	Delivering the Teaching / Learning Process _____	16
	5. Project-based Distance Learning _____	16
	6. Using Case Studies to Support the Teaching Process _____	18
	7. Mathematics and Online Learning _____	20
	8. Increasing Student Interaction Through Forums _____	22
D	Emotional and Teaching Support _____	24
	9. Apprenticeships as an Alternative for Psycho-Social Support During Lockdown _____	24
	10. Hackathon During the Pandemic: Psychological Support and Encouragement for Lesson Attendance _____	26
E	Apprenticeships _____	28
	11. Cooking Competition as an Alternative to Apprenticeships _____	28
F	Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning _____	30
	12. Producing Videos to Balance Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning _____	30





Teaching Materials

1. Developing Diverse Digital Materials on Mesovet Platform to Support Students During Lockdown

Subject:
Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship

Teacher: Ermira Mani

School:
"Hamdi Bushati", Shkodër



“ Students can now attend online lessons without feeling the need for a basic textbook and without teacher's presence. ”

Context

Given the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic and the interruption of lessons delivered in school premises, alternative ways were needed. Carrying out online lessons in unfavorable conditions was the first challenge teachers faced. In quite a short time, measures were taken for the preparation of remaining lessons, adapting to social distancing conditions. However, priority was given to the State Matura. MesoVET digital platform developed by 'Skills for Jobs' project was enriched with instructional materials and became great support. 'Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship' is one of the platform courses. In a short time, digital materials were developed for narrative content, PowerPoint presentations, tutorials, various schemes, case studies, quizzes, etc.

Learning Outcomes for the Student

- ✓ Understands the need for personnel management.
- ✓ Learns how to manage professional staff by promoting talents and developing career opportunities.
- ✓ Identifies the concepts and tools needed for business decision-making.
- ✓ Understands the need for market evaluation and the usefulness of business marketing, as well as how to achieve its objectives.
- ✓ Understands financial concepts and tools used for financial management.

Challenges



Timeline for development of materials

Due to immediate measures taken in response to the onset of the pandemic in our country, the time for developing online content was limited.



The variety of instructional materials

(Videos, PowerPoints, narrative texts, test bank, case studies, various schemes). Given different students types, teachers tried to use a variety of materials to foster interest and inclusion in the platform.



Various sources of information

Nowadays, the possibility to access information equals the risk of obtaining information from inaccurate sources. Time and expertise were needed to find accurate information and to meet course objectives, adapt to the age of the students, current conditions and market or industry novelties.



Development of easily usable materials even by senior / Matura students themselves

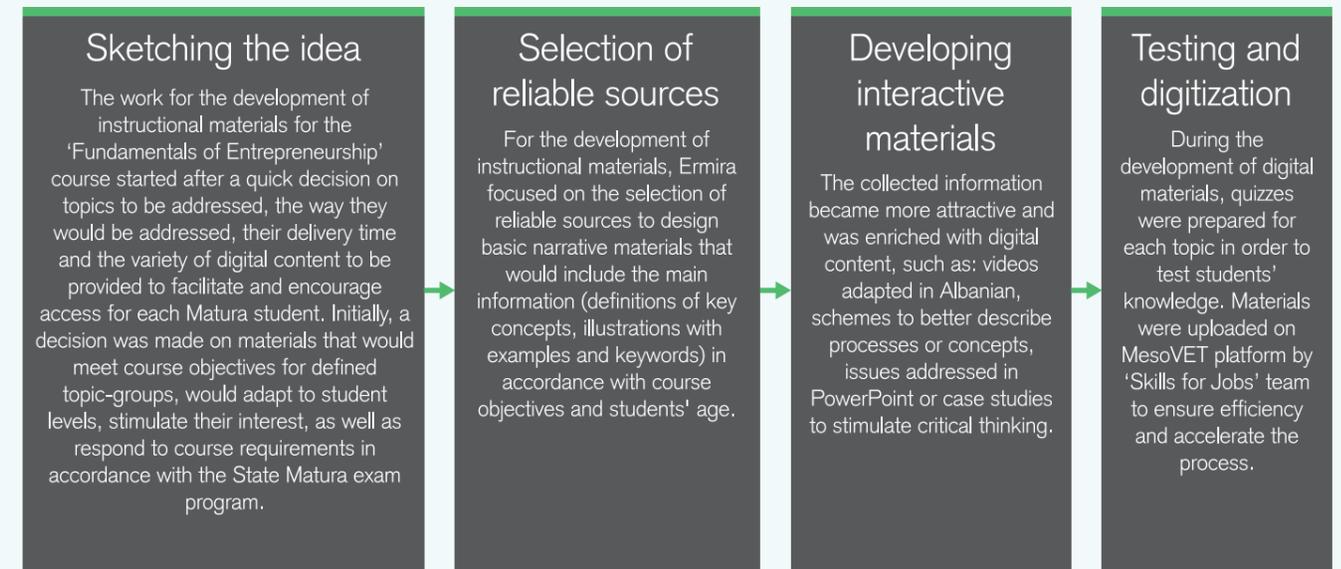
Interactive methods encourage students to work independently. This was one of the main goals of designing digital content in the 'Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship' course, thus developing an additional competency.



Development of materials in accordance with the State Matura program

Carrying out State Matura in inappropriate learning conditions was quite an issue. The course materials were drafted in line with State Matura program, where 'Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship' subject is part.

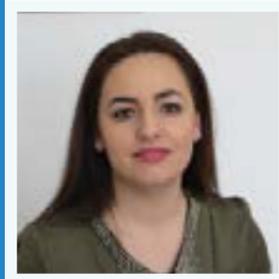
Process



Learning Impact

Interactive methods and materials increase students' interest and involvement in the learning process. Students can now attend online lessons without needing a basic textbook or teachers' presence. Digital materials and tools used in a course promote both individual and interactive (group) learning, as well as the understanding and memorization of key concepts. This process enables students to test their level of knowledge by taking online quizzes, without needing teachers' presence. They also enjoy flexibility in the process and time-wise.

2. Teachers' Collaboration for Developing Digital Materials for a Course



Subject:

Entrepreneurial Behavior / Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship

Teachers:

Ermira Mani, Dorina Dudi, Alma Ferhati, Mirela Sarja

Schools:

'Hamdi Bushati', Shkodër
'Kolin Gjoka', Lezhë
'Technical-Economic', Tiranë
'Salih Çeka', Elbasan



Technology should not be considered a challenge, rather an opportunity to support the working process.



Challenges

'Skills for Jobs' enables teachers to freely design interactive content to convey knowledge. This is a great opportunity for teachers and students, but at the same time it poses several challenges. The multiple selection options and the teacher's yearning to include all content can bring about the opposite effect on the student. Diversity and information coming in different forms risks overloading the subject and misleading the student. To prevent this, the working team has tried to filter material to fit the time allowed for a particular topic. This was achieved by choosing the content which they considered most appropriate and attractive for students' level and age.

Lack of infrastructure and internet among students has forced the working team to sometimes avoid the use of too heavy-loaded videos. However, they have found and translated short videos (not more than 15-20 seconds) into Albanian, explaining concepts in a focused but interesting way for students.

Process

The basic content of 'Entrepreneurial Behavior' course was drafted by teachers during the secondary education reform in Albania (2009-2013). Initially, finding materials was quite challenging. However, teachers managed to edit some material which was later used by vocational education schools. Having a long experience in teaching the subject, teachers managed to enrich it. Meanwhile, they were invited by 'Skills for Jobs' to design content with wider and more diverse information, including videos and other multimedia materials.

Work organization and communication

The process of developing materials started with dividing topics for each teacher to work on, followed by constant communication and cooperation via Whatsapp groups, phone or email. Updating and sharing content to receive everyone's feedback harmonised the topics included in the final material, although teachers worked individually and came from different schools and regions.

Diversifying content

The working team is made of highly experienced teachers, trained by foreign and Albanian experts. They brought their expertise and foreign literature in the entrepreneurship field. The content was enriched with videos, originally in English and later translated into Albanian.

During the drafting process, the focus was not only on theoretical but also on practical activities related to entrepreneurship. This makes the content simpler, more understandable and diverse for students, while helping them perceive from both a theoretical and practical point of view.

"Flexibility in the way one works and teaches, the inclusion of innovative forms in teaching and the use of technology are key to the teacher's success. Technology should not be considered a challenge, rather an opportunity to support the working process", the teachers' team states.

Learning Impact



Easily accessible information

Once content becomes accessible on the platform, teachers share it with their colleagues teaching this course nationwide through various channels. This is done not only due to the teachers' yearning to make information available to stakeholders, but also due to the advantages it brings to both teachers and students, especially during the pandemic where online learning became indispensable. The possibility of accessing the content online for free is a very important point.



Increasing students' interest and commitment

Despite difficulties in selecting and designing interactive content, its positive impact to students is indisputable. Content digitization has allowed its use not only in by teachers at school, but also at home. This supports blended learning, where students attend lessons, read the material in advance, submit an assignment, or become part of online discussions. The application of blended learning has resulted effective for this course, with increased students' interest and engagement both during lessons and beyond official school hours. Teachers aim to gradually get students used to the idea of synchronous and asynchronous learning.



Inclusion

Using interactive video material, online discussions through padlets, quizzes, mentimeter, etc., teachers managed to raise students' interest by stimulating their engagement and sharing opinions. Access to content from both computer and mobile phone ensures wider inclusion and flexibility, time and place-wise.



Digital Platforms

3. Using Digital Learning Platforms to Support the Practical Learning Process

Subject:
Apprenticeships in ICT

Teacher:
Juljan Kasapi

School:
'Salih Ceka', Elbasan



Online learning in ICT is feasible and it is the best solution, not only during lockdowns.



Context

The pandemic did not find ICT students and teachers unprepared. To present in the practice's cabinet, Juljan often used platforms which he also utilised for distance learning. These platforms facilitated communication, dissemination of materials and evaluation tools for the teaching / learning process.

However, in addition to familiarity with platforms, explanation quality and having students' attention are also important. It is advisable for the teacher to use online videos or audio communication as it increases student's interest. Depending on issues or activities being addressed, the focus should be on the process and content, rather than on teacher's virtual presence.

The one obstacle Juljan encountered during his work, was his students' online presence. As the ICT direction needs appropriate digital infrastructure, attempts were made so that 80-90% of students he teaches could participate in online lessons. However, for modules such as 'Computer Networks', a computer simulator is not sufficient; practical learning is also quite important.



Learning Outcomes for the Student

- ✓ Builds C language programs (Easily carried out online).
- ✓ Solves hardware issues (Physical presence of the student needed. The student finds it difficult to practice knowledge due to lack of equipment).
- ✓ Solves problems in operating systems (Easily carried out online).
- ✓ Learns how to use multimedia techniques (Easily carried out online).
- ✓ Learns how to design and build computer infrastructure (Easily carried out online).
- ✓ Implements security and protection in computer systems (Easily carried out online.)

Delivery

The teaching process was carried out on Zoom, which helped teachers and students not only communicating upcoming activities but also presenting them. During online communication, students could ask questions and work independently. Afterwards, each student presented his/her work through Zoom share screen functionality and practiced under teacher's supervision.

For remote interaction Juljan used WhatsApp groups, where he received feedback or questions from students and discussed their most frequently encountered issues. To assess students, he evaluated presentations they made via share screen. He also used other platforms for online testing, such as Kahoot and Socrative, and in special cases MesoVet and Google Forms.

Learning Impact

As ICT students have been exposed to online platforms before, no significant challenge was observed during online learning. Consequently, students' presence in online lessons was high. What changed was the necessity of using them. "Online learning in ICT is feasible and it is the best solution, not only during lockdowns," says Juljan.

Teaching / learning materials used by the teacher					
Most used applications / platforms					
Other platforms					

4. Using Different Online Platforms for Online Learning

Subject:
Apprenticeships

Teacher:
Lorena File

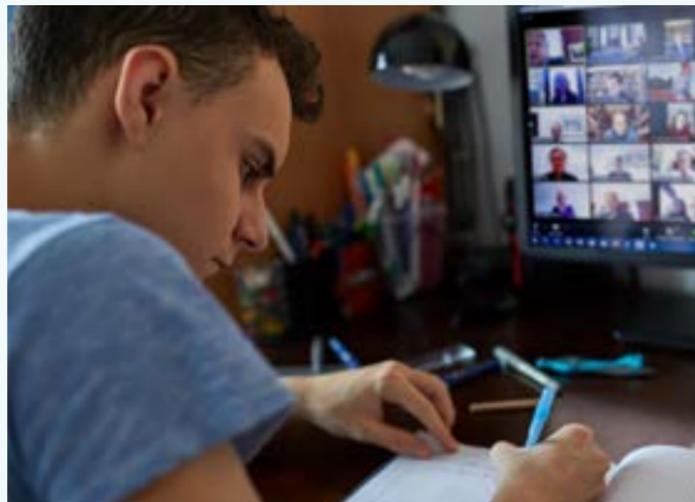
School:
Industrial "Pavarësia", Vlorë



“ Online learning has created the basis for open communication between teachers and students, which is not often the case in traditional education. ”

Context

Remote learning has changed the way teachers and students perceive teaching and learning. It creates educational opportunities, allowing students to learn in more appropriate settings and during their spare time. Lorena noticed these effects during distance learning. The interesting thing was that despite difficulties of a situation never encountered before, online learning changed the relationship between teachers and students. It laid the groundwork for open communication between them, which is not often the case in traditional education.



Learning Outcomes for the Student General Competencies

- ✓ Learns how to correctly communicate in writing and orally to express his/her thoughts and feelings and to argue opinions on various issues.
- ✓ Learns how to use different sources and techniques of collecting and utilizing the necessary information for his/her personal and professional development.
- ✓ Learns how to respect principles of teamwork and actively cooperate in achieving objectives.

Learning Outcomes for the Student Professional Competencies

- ✓ Learns how to organize the workplace.
- ✓ Learns how to select materials, tools and equipment.
- ✓ Learns how to use and maintain work tools and materials.
- ✓ Learns how to apply occupational standards.
- ✓ Learns how to use of visual editors and tools they provide for developing dynamic professional pages.
- ✓ Learns how to perform simple economic calculations for processes related to the activity for website development and maintenance.
- ✓ Learns how to communicate with professional ethics.

Delivery During the pandemic, Lorena used several platforms:



MesoVet



Google Classroom



Zoom



WhatsApp

The materials created and the open courses on the platform have been of great help, both for the teacher and students. Oftentimes, when students were unable to attend a class, they used the platform at a time of their convenience to hand in assignments. Results were quite satisfactory, and the teacher noticed progress while grading them.

What was interesting during

distance learning were Zoom meetings requested by students, where they discussed topics they studied on MesoVET platform. Meanwhile, WhatsApp has been effective in private consultations, when students needed further explanation on topics they did not consider relevant to be discussed in groups.

Students' assessment was based on notes and evaluations Lorena made in the electronic registry.

She also developed tests for her courses on MesoVET platform, which helped in following students' progress.

Learning Impact



Improved students' digital skills



Enriched the process with new forms (videos, simulations, etc.)



Encouraged students' independent work



Increased active participation of students and parents



Students learned how to use the internet to gain knowledge



Delivering the Teaching / Learning Process

5. Project-based Distance Learning

Subject: Entrepreneurial Behavior

Class: XIII

Teacher: Mirela Sarja

School: "Salih Çeka", Elbasan



Online learning works if subjects are interactive, well thought-out, and if students are provided with necessary support.



Learning Outcomes for the Student

General Competencies

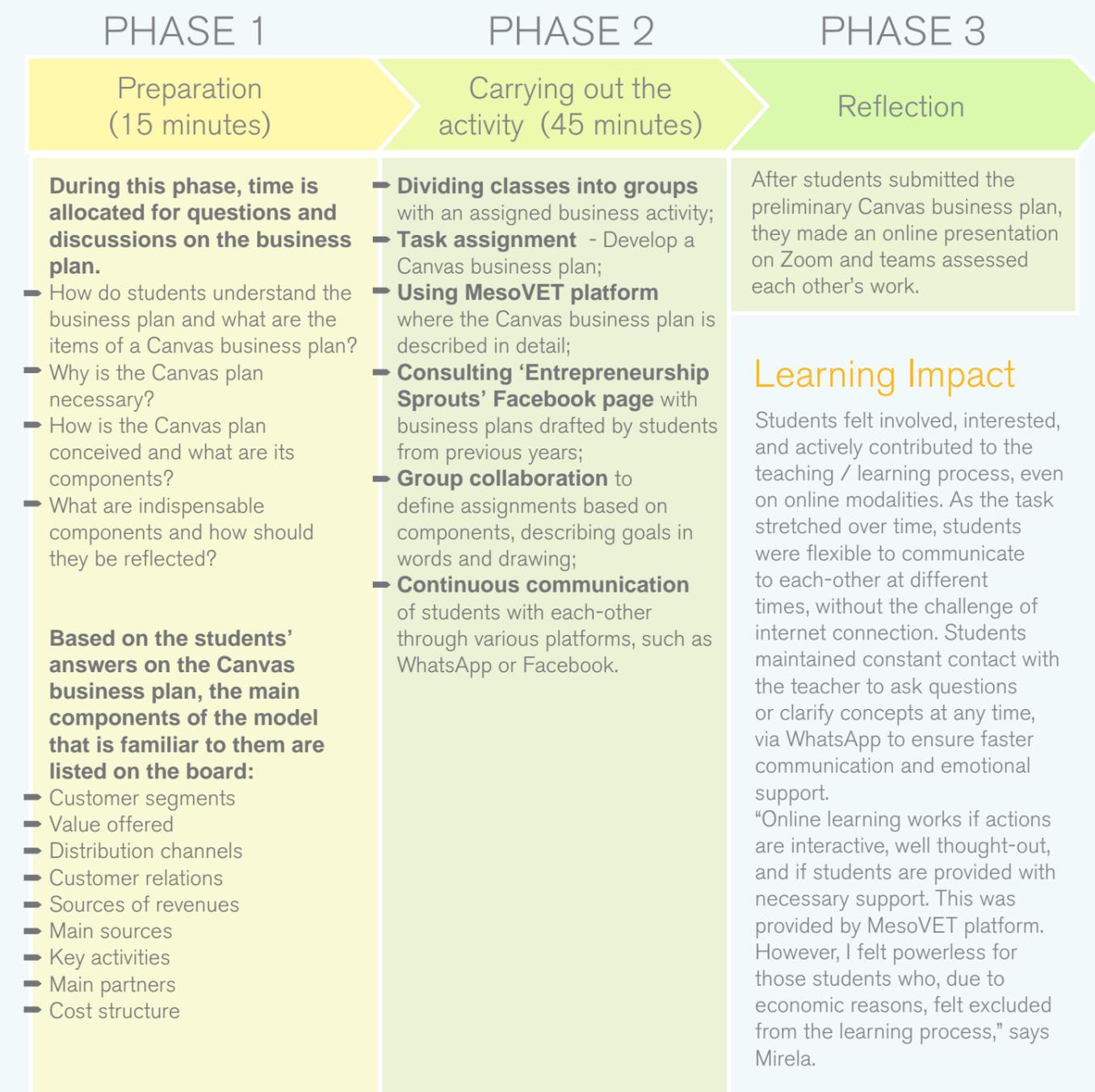
- ✓ Explains the Canvas business plan.
- ✓ Explains its role and its use.
- ✓ Manages to plan a Canvas business plan.

Personal and Professional Competencies

- ✓ Develops communication skills and creativity.
- ✓ Develops entrepreneurial skills for his/her future.
- ✓ Respects teamwork principles and cooperation to achieve objectives.
- ✓ Manages to evaluate and self-evaluate by improving and furthering his/her achievements.
- ✓ Achieves physical, mental and emotional commitment in performing the task in the professional, personal and social context.
- ✓ Contributes to the design of simple business plans and performs cash flow analysis.
- ✓ Contributes to the design of information materials for the company and its products. e saj.

Main concepts: Business plan Canvas business plan Business plan items	Methodology: Project	Activities: Discussion of ideas Group work Research	Materials needed: Computer, internet (since they are working on MesoVET platform)	Time: 90 minutes
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Process



6. Using Case Studies to Support the Teaching Process

Subject: Defect Diagnosis in Transport Vehicles

Teacher: Vojsava Delilaj

School: 'Ali Myftiu', Elbasan



Increased engagement creates opportunities for professional communication, exchanging experience and mutual assistance between teachers and students.



Context

During distance learning, keeping interaction with students was one of the biggest challenges. To address this, Vojsava used technology. Besides the standard preparation of lesson scripts and digital learning content (using videos, images, development of menti.com, websites, social networks, etc.), the use of innovative teaching methods, such as: case studies, stories related to the topic or team work, the lesson was carried out successfully.



Learning Outcomes for the Student

- ✓ Describes the main defects in joints and aggregates, various electrical/electronic circuits in transport vehicles.
- ✓ Explains the causes and consequences of various defects in transport vehicles.
- ✓ Decides on checks and tests needed for defect repair in transport vehicles.
- ✓ Analyzes the results of tests and checks needed for defect repair in transport vehicles.
- ✓ Decides how to repair transport vehicles defects.
- ✓ Simulates a defect in joints and aggregates, various electrical/electronic circuits in transport vehicles.
- ✓ Adapts theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge for defect diagnosis of transport vehicles.
- ✓ Actively participates and cooperates in the debate conducted during the lesson.

Process

Vojsava used case studies as key to quality teaching. Case studies help in professional problem-solving, student engagement, debate, and the involvement of former school students and business specialists. Case studies were at first published on Auto2010 EL Facebook page. This online community of students and teachers has been active for 10 years to help increase the quality of teaching and achieve the highest possible learning outcomes.

Vojsava has used this communication method due to its advantages:



This successful experience was used by Vojsava during distance learning. Case studies posted on Facebook increased participation, quality of professional communication, quality of students' assessment, cooperation between students and teachers. Online communication caught the attention of various individuals who sought solutions to defects of their transport vehicles, publishing the issue they were experiencing as a case study on this page.

Each group member covers the part he/she is most experienced in, using both theoretical knowledge and practical experience. Initially, the teacher evaluates them based on their arguments on causes and consequences of the defect, and afterwards through necessary tests and checks the students perform for a more complete diagnosis. The student evaluates the results of tests or checks by comparing them with data in the service manual. Thus, he/she is also assessed for this skill (using Autodata software).

Learning Impact

There has been an increased engagement of students, alumni, teachers, professionals in the country and abroad. Several success stories have been identified during these years, where former students, now self-employed, host current students to carry out apprenticeships in their company. This increases trust and ensures continuity.

Increased engagement has created opportunities for professional communication, exchanging experience and mutual assistance between teachers and students. It prepared students to provide practical solutions to problems in companies where they were later employed. Moreover, willingness and courage of former school students to manage and run a business of their own has increased, supported and motivated by knowledge and skills acquired in school.

7. Mathematics and Online Learning

Subject: Mathematics

Teacher: Brilanda Kraja

School: 'Hamdi Bushati',
Shkodër



“

My work with students during the pandemic proved that mathematics, like any other subject, can be taught without the teacher's presence.

”

Context

Most teachers and students see mathematics as a subject that cannot be taught asynchronously. However, Brilanda's work with students during the pandemic proved that mathematics, like any other subject, can be taught without the teacher's presence. As schools were closed due to the pandemic, the teacher began to explore the most effective ways for distance learning. Considering the difficult initial conditions, especially for State Matura students, MesoVET platform was useful in revising most important chapters of courses taught during 4 years of high school.

Learning Outcomes for the Student

- ✓ Demonstrates mathematical skills in meeting requirements for carrying out a task.
- ✓ Solves mathematical problems through explaining each step.
- ✓ Asks questions and provides structured opinions about some problem or task solution, while summarizing actions.
- ✓ Solves uncomplicated mathematical problems with or without using technology.
- ✓ Selects and implements appropriate strategies for solving real-life problems, using examples from other scientific fields.
- ✓ Uses algebraic and geometric symbols to describe practical situations.
- ✓ Integrates mathematical knowledge and skills with situations or phenomena from other contexts (daily life, other subjects, sports, etc.).

Process

The teaching / learning process was made possible using short videos uploaded on MesoVET platform. These videos played a crucial role in teaching summarized information about actions with numbers, powers, plane figures, shapes, etc. It was helpful for students to have the answers to exercises for the main course chapters. In addition to videos and exercises, math games turned out to be helpful for the teaching / learning process, as they helped relieve stress.

Students' projects were also part of this process, helping them put mathematical knowledge into practice. Projects were developed as a business plan, where students used mathematical knowledge to compile clear financial statement with costs and profits. The whole process would start with market research, which showed the need for their business ideas.



"I am very pleased with students' projects, not only for their innovative ideas but also the development of their digital skills. Some students had not previously had the opportunity to use technology. However, considering the projects I received, this shortcoming was not evident at all. I want to emphasize that the best project was exactly from one of these students," says Brilanda.

Learning Impact

Outcomes were positive, which was reflected in State Matura exam results. In March, teaching the rest of the course and the revising work for the State Matura senior students seemed impossible. MesoVET platform was like a light at the end of the tunnel. Initially, not all students were able to attend online learning. However, after Matura students returned to school in May, it was possible for them watching videos in the platform thanks to the infrastructure provided by the school. Subsequently, discussions on different cases resulted in faster learning of important chapters. Students who could use the platform had quite positive results in the exam. Brilanda also taught 10th graders, who felt quite comfortable using the platform.



8. Increasing Student Interaction Through Forums

Subject: Digital Marketing

Teacher: Zamira Shehaj

School: 'Commercial' school, Vlorë



The feedback was immediate by both parties: the student could get immediate answers to any questions and the teacher could assess knowledge and insights acquired by him/her in real time.



Context

The new normality dictated by COVID-19 pandemic affected every aspect of life, including teaching and learning. In the new context of online learning, teachers and students were facing new challenges, never encountered before during face-to-face learning process. The biggest challenge was ensuring coherent communication and active student involvement. To solve this problem, one of the tools Zamira chose was MesoVET platform. In this virtual learning environment, there is a forum for discussion and exchange of ideas, where teacher and student can interact in real time.



Learning Outcomes for the Student

- ✓ Learns how to use social media and various digital platforms.
- ✓ Clearly defines digital marketing types and methods.
- ✓ Creates content to be uploaded on digital platforms and social media.
- ✓ Promotes the selected marketing product.



Challenges

Lack of didactic materials

The forum is one of the tools that Zamira mostly used in the Digital Marketing course. The biggest challenge with this specific module was the lack of a textbook. Although it was an issue of concern even before the pandemic, in the face-to-face learning context work was facilitated by the teacher explaining and analysing online materials.

Difficulty in assessing knowledge

Initially, the Digital Marketing course on MesoVET platform enabled students to only use uploaded content. Assessing students' knowledge was still a challenge.

Process

Forums were created with the assistance of 'Skills for Jobs' project, organised in **groups of students from the same class**. Students quickly got accustomed to them.

In the first class, they studied the marketing course lecture on the platform.

In the second class, the lesson was discussed in the forum, analyzing terminology as well as new concepts.

The third class consisted in assessing comprehension of new knowledge asking different questions and student assignments.

To assess students' knowledge, chat rooms in forums were used for groups of students divided by classes. This new form of communication, similar to WhatsApp chat, was immediately embraced by students and became the only communication and learning method during that period.

After studying various lectures on the platform, at the end of the class students answered questions and had discussions with each-other and with the teacher in the forum. Another advantage of this functionality was the ability to upload photos, videos and various links to present students' work in a more clear and interesting way, as this subject is closely related to digital forms of communication.

Learning Impact

The outcome of using the platform was increased learning efficiency. Communication between student and teacher in the platform brought the two parties closer, resembling the lesson delivered in the classroom. Students could ask questions while studying the lecture on the platform. The feedback was immediate by both parties: the student could get immediate answers to any questions and the teacher could assess knowledge and insights acquired by him/her in real time.





Emotional and Teaching Support

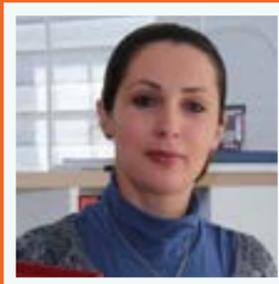
9. Apprenticeships as an Alternative for Psycho-Social Support During Lockdown

Subject: Apprenticeships in 'Textile-Garments' direction

School: "Hamdi Bushati", Shkodër

Teacher: Rezeta Lesha

Psychologist: Ertjola Lulaj



Context

Due to the pandemic, learning was immediately transferred at home, requiring a switch to online learning. Students' mental health was one of the priorities of school staff. Youngsters suddenly found themselves isolated, away from friends and school, surrounded by general anxiety and stress.

In psychology, handicraft is considered one of the main anti-stress strategies, as it promotes increased self-efficiency and self-esteem and helps express one's emotional state.

Recognizing therapeutic values of handicraft, the school psychologist collaborated with apprenticeships teachers of 'Textile-Garments' direction to help students feeling calm and expressing their emotions through embroidery.



Carrying out home-based apprenticeships resulted an effective strategy to managing stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and time.



Process

During the pandemic and online learning, students in 'Textile-Garments' focused on drawing sketches of current themes, working with different techniques on embroidery, recycling, and producing personalized pieces of work.

The apprenticeships teacher continuously disseminated audio and video materials adhering to the curriculum, but also using additional materials from Pinterest or YouTube.

Online learning was a challenge for many students who could not afford it due to their socio-economic situation. To assist in the process, the school provided the material base for home-based apprenticeships. In this perspective, 'Skills for Jobs' and partner businesses joined forces to supply students with materials.



Learning Impact

Carrying out home-based apprenticeships resulted an effective strategy to managing stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and time. It is worth noting that students were quite productive during this period and created an online sales network for their products with the support of family, teachers, and the school. This opened a successful start-up window, and the impact was direct on the economic growth of students' families.

Inter alia, the focus has been promoting solidarity and support for persons in need. Items produced during home-based apprenticeships were put on sale. Part of the revenues were used to support therapies for children with autism spectrum disorder and with economic difficulties.



10. Hackathon During the Pandemic: Psychological Support and Encouragement for Lesson Attendance

Subject: ICT

Teacher: Jetmir Shtjefni

School: 'Kolin Gjoka', Lezhë



More than ever, students needed support in learning how to adapt and how to maneuver in the current situation, in a sustainable and confident way, to later thrive in the post-COVID-19 world.



Learning Outcomes for the Student



Plans website development



Prepares and designs website components



Codes the website in design and programming languages



Tests website functionalities

Challenges

A sudden and new normality

Everyone had to quickly adapt to the new normality, change their way of living, and overcome unknown challenges. For students, the impact was considerable, affecting their performance in school. In that situation, Jetmir felt he had to come up with innovative ideas to engage his students, beyond what was offered in the curriculum.

Lack of digital infrastructure

Students of 'Kolin Gjoka' school come from different social and economic backgrounds, one of the main obstacles being lack of internet access, digital equipment and electricity.

Organisation

One of the biggest challenges was faced during the organisation phase. In the absence of physical contact with students and colleagues, communicating required much more time and effort.



Process

To compensate for learning gaps and to keep the students engaged and entertained during the lockdown, Jetmir organized 'Hack the Crisis - Kolin Gjoka' online competition. It aimed to find innovative technology-based solutions for emergency needs arising during the pandemic. Students from different school profiles, such as: Business-Economics, ICT, Social and Health Services, etc., were encouraged to participate in the competition.

01 Preparations

Due to challenging conditions, Jetmir knew he could not organize the competition alone. He felt the need to cooperate with students since the preparatory phase. After a Zoom conversation with most technology-savvy students and other channels with students lacking digital infrastructure, they started organising the Hackathon. In a second moment, they decided on steps and rules students had to follow for developing their projects.

- Brainstorming ideas in teams and coming up with a common idea
- Website planning
- Website design
- Collecting multimedia elements and elaborating them for website development
- Website coding in programming languages
- Website testing

02 Developing projects

03 Project presentations

Students submitted 25 projects, while only 8 of them qualified for the final presentation phase. At this stage, Jetmir invited colleagues from other 'Skills for Jobs' partner VET schools to be part of the jury. In the finale in Zoom, students had a set amount of time to present their projects. Projects by finalist students who were not able to participate were presented by the teacher, who had closely followed and supported them in every step.

Learning Impact

Learning and professional skills acquisition was not the only focus of the competition. Students also developed soft skills, such as communication and collaboration, and entrepreneurial skills. The competition helped increase creativity, stimulated students to take personal or group initiatives, and gave them room to showcase their potential.

To avoid infrastructure obstacles, project submission deadlines and templates were flexible. It was inspiring to see that although initiators were high-achieving students, other students gradually became involved.

Another important aspect in this venture was the emotional support. Faced with many surprises and sudden changes, students felt tension and fear over the unknown. The competition helped ensuring positive focus and a sense of accomplishment among them. All participants became part of a worldwide community that strives to find technological solutions for societal benefit in times of crises.



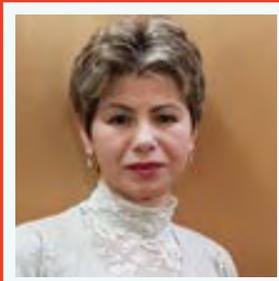
Apprenticeships

11. Cooking Competition as an Alternative to Apprenticeships

Subject: Apprenticeships in 'Hospitality-Tourism' direction

Teacher: Merita Koço

School: 'Commercial' school, Vlorë



Context

At the beginning of each school year, 'Commercial' school in Vlorë prepares the apprenticeship plan, a large part carried out in businesses. However, plans had to change after the spread of the pandemic. The school staff had to come up with ideas and modalities for remote apprenticeships. This was challenging for teachers and students, especially in the 'Hospitality-Tourism' direction, 'Kitchen-Confectionery' profile. This profile needs stimulating environments, work tools and material base. Meanwhile, constant supervision and contact with students is imperative.

Thus, teacher Merita had to change her teaching plan and choose modules and topics to be delivered at home with the existing material base. Not all students could afford to purchase the required products, so it was decided that they could use notes, photos and videos of their home-based work. To increase participation, Merita decided to choose the best work at the end of the apprenticeship period. Due to challenging conditions, flexibility was needed. After students submitted their work, at the end of each month they held Zoom meetings to present and share everybody's work and make comments.



Parents kept writing to thank me for the opportunity given to their children to be part of the competition.



Learning Outcomes for the Student

- Performs preparatory processes for products according to learning outcomes.
- Uses work tools and equipment according to cooking rules.
- Prepares meat, fish, dough assortments, following defined techniques and processes.
- Prepares assortments with special dough, bread, cakes, etc.
- Cooks typical Albanian recipes.
- Decorates the prepared food following the aesthetical rules.
- Calculates the cost of cooked products.
- Implements the rules of hygiene in the kitchen.

Media involvement

The project took on greater proportions when 'One TV' local television channel agreed to cooperate with 'Commercial' school in Vlorë for 'House Kitchen' cooking competition. This was an initiative by Aldo Mehmeti, kitchen chef at 'Marina Bay' resort, with the participation of students. Each Friday, students cooked from home and competed on live TV. During the show, they explained ingredients and preparation for their dishes. Finally, the student was evaluated for the way the dish was cooked and cooking rules he/she followed.



Involvement of local businesses

The role of Chef Aldo Mehmeti as a judge was very important in this competition. He followed students step by step, giving valuable feedback for ways of improvement.

Challenges

The lockdown was challenging for the competition, as the TV channel could not broadcast from students' homes. First episodes were recorded with low-quality phone cameras.

Over time, measures against COVID-19 were eased, and the show improved. The TV channel started recording at school, which increased quality and consequently viewers' interest.



Learning Impact



Promoting the school in a time with limited contacts with the audience



Positive impact on students' emotional state



Assisted students in terms of theoretical and practical knowledge and digital skills



Increased students' self-confidence in cooking and presenting their work



Increased positive competition among students



Increased professionalism and seriousness at work



Increased employability chances for students participating in the competition, as the winner was employed by 'Marina Bay' resort



Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

12. Producing Videos to Balance Synchronous and Asynchronous Learning

Subject: Chemistry

Teacher: Rudina Gjoka

School: 'Kolin Gjoka', Lezhë



Distance learning helps students interact with one-another and the teacher similarly to the classroom setting.



require the use of the board to explain or solve exercises and problems, such as chemistry.

Learning Outcomes for the Student

- ✓ Lists structural features of alkanes.
- ✓ Presents structural formulas for alkanes from 1 to 10 carbon atoms and names them.
- ✓ Writes the characteristic chemical reactions of alkanes.
- ✓ Writes reactions to obtain alkanes.
- ✓ Gives the definition of isomerism.
- ✓ Constructs and names chain and position isomers.

Context

Distance learning was new and challenging for teachers and students. The main challenge Rudina faced was the level of the students; they had not dealt with Chemistry since the 9th grade and consequently they had knowledge gaps. The teacher knew that asynchronous learning by only using one single platform (MesoVET) would not suffice.

With 'Skills for Jobs' support, Rudina was trained on the development of pedagogical videos. This helped her develop explanatory videos on:

- new segmented information, by presenting it step by step accompanied with illustrative figures and emphasizing the main concepts through voice-over;
- posing questions and answers on new information or daily life;
- solving exercises step by step.

Rudina developed videos using various software, such as: Power Point, Snipping Tool, Voice Recorder, and edited them in OpenShot Video Editor. She used a Drawing Tablet device to create explanatory videos for exercises, One Note software to add text, while recording them in Zoom. Using the Drawing Tablet is helpful for the teacher during synchronous learning, especially in subjects that

Process

Rudina used MesoVET and Zoom for distance learning. Before each lesson, she uploaded on MesoVET platform:

- learning outcomes for the topic;
- instructional videos;
- brief information on video content and instructions for structured note-taking;
- forums;
- cooperative wikis;
- solved exercises;
- glossary;
- quizzes;
- classwork / homework.

MesoVET introduced students with the topic, learning outcomes, content and lesson structure, while Zoom served to carry out lessons. The teacher presented topics from the chemistry course at MesoVET, through Zoom screen share option.

1. Initially, the teacher addressed new knowledge or unclear concepts.
2. Next, they discussed students' answers in the forum.
3. Finally, students took the quiz on MesoVET platform and the teacher explained upcoming homework assignments.

Learning Impact

Distance learning that combines asynchronous and synchronous learning through MesoVET and Zoom, guides and encourages students to acquire, apply, organise and evaluate knowledge. They also interact with one-another and the teacher similarly to the classroom setting.





DISTANCE LEARNING BEST PRACTICES

FROM 'SKILLS FOR JOBS' PARTNER VET SCHOOLS

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